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SUBJECT: MOROCCO'S USFP/SOCIALIST PARTY PICKS NEW SECRETARY
GENERAL

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: After several months of indecision and party infighting, the Union of Popular Socialist Forces Party (USFP) elected Abdelouahed Radi as its First Secretary on November 8th, and received a congratulatory visit from Ambassador Riley soon thereafter. The victory, by a thin plurality over some half dozen opponents, was accompanied by the election of many new faces to the party's ruling Political Bureau. Radi, with only a weak mandate, likely will not reverse the party's sinking electoral fortunes. Key observers both inside and outside the party consider him a transitional figure. Radi has publicly identified three priorities for the USFP: (1) healing party divisions; (2) revitalizing the governing alliance; and (3) uniting left-wing political parties into a coalition prior to the 2009 municipal elections. Privately, Radi said that amending the Moroccan Constitution to strengthen parliament as a fourth party priority. The USFP's internal voting was direct and transparent, a substantial advancement of party democracy, following in the footsteps of the Rally of Independents (RNI) and Party of Justice and Development (PJD) as the only Moroccan parties to democratically elect their leaders. End Summary.

Leadership Deadlock Broken,
But Party Remains Fractured

¶12. (SBU) After several months of indecision and party infighting, the USFP, Morocco's leading socialist political party, elected Abdelouahed Radi as its First Secretary on November 8. While Radi was the winner, he obtained less than a third of the party votes -- reflecting stiff competition and continued divisions within the USFP. (See election results in paragraph 11 below.) After the failure in June of the first round of the USFP's Eighth Party Congress to select a First Secretary, voting reforms were adopted in the second round in November to elect a party leader by a straight vote of party members for the first time. The party also adopted direct elections of its Political Bureau members, the party's 22-member Board of Directors, abandoning a moribund system of patron lists, which had been criticized for giving the First Secretary too much power. The party also rejected motions to implement a runoff mechanism of the top two vote-getters, thus, keeping the First Secretary more beholden to various party factions, according to party member Brahim Bouabid, brother of a new Political Bureau member. As a result, the Political Bureau, the party's formal decision-making body, will be strengthened vis-a-vis the Secretary-General.

Radi Confirms Intention to Resign as Justice Minister

¶13. (SBU) In an effort to boost his candidacy, Radi announced

prior to the final vote that, if elected First Secretary, he would resign as Minister of Justice. Following the election, print media questioned whether Radi would honor this commitment. During a meeting with the Ambassador on November 21, Radi confirmed that he had submitted his resignation to King Mohammed VI and was awaiting a response. (Comment: According to the Moroccan Constitution, a Minister cannot resign without permission from the King.) Radi also expressed his sincere desire to concentrate on reorganizing the USFP and prepare it for the 2009 municipal elections, closing by saying: "My work for the party serves the country." We expect the King will accept the resignation. A refusal would be damaging to the party, and would bring the palace's reform agenda into question.

A Weakened USFP Stumbles Forward

¶4. (SBU) Immediately after his election, Radi publicly identified three priorities for the USFP: (1) healing the divisions within the party; (2) revitalizing the governing Koutla (i.e., "alliance" in Arabic); and (3) forming a coalition of left-wing political parties, according to press reports. Party contacts confirmed to us that Radi's election virtually guarantees that the "rose party" will remain in coalition with the current government -- a point of considerable debate during party Congress. Several rivals for the party's top slot (e.g., Fathalla Ouallaou, Driss Lachgar and Habib El-Malki) all threatened to withdraw the USFP from the government to regroup after years of stagnation under the ex-chair, Minister of State Mohammed El-Yazghi, who was ousted after the abysmal showing of the USFP in the

September 2007 parliamentary election.

Healing Wounds and Preparing the Next Election

¶5. (SBU) To begin the process of reunifying the tattered USFP ranks, Radi, considered to be a consensus candidate with "no enemies in the party," has called for "an expanded internal political dialogue." He has promised vertical and horizontal rebuilding of the party in preparation for the June 12, 2009 communal elections -- what Radi calls the "new challenge of the party." Radi will attempt to strengthen representative bodies at the regional and local level and to establish a clear political platform for the elections and the decentralization of government called for by the King in his Green March speech in November. Radi's three-year term should expire before the next parliamentary election in 2012, and he has said he would serve for only a one term, according to Bouabid.

Revitalizing the Koutla

¶6. (SBU) Radi's announcement that one of the party's top priorities will be revitalization of the Koutla is in line with Radi's long-standing reputation as a "man-of-the-palace." It also dismisses the possibility of an unprecedented alliance with the Islamist-inspired PJD, which had been called for by Radi-party-rival Driss Lachgar.

Consolidation of the Left

¶7. (SBU) In part, responding to the King's stated desire to consolidate the political spectrum and not wanting to face the 2009 elections alone, the USFP has been in dialogue with many small parties of the political left for the last six months concerning forming a coalition, according to Labor Party Leader Benatiq Abdelkrim, a former USFP member. These parties include the Labor Party (PT), the Democratic Forces Front (FFD), the Democratic Socialist Party (PS), and the

Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS), which is in the government. The purpose of this coalition would be to unite the efforts of like-minded parties of the left to cooperate in the upcoming 2009 municipal elections through the establishment of common platforms and non-aggression pacts for electoral races.

¶18. (SBU) In countering the argument that seeking coalition with other left-wing political parties and remaining in the Koutla represented an inherent contradiction, Abdelkrim told embassy officers that the USFP is seeking coalition, not fusion, with small like-minded parties, in contrast to the practice of the Party of Authenticity and Modernity, which has absorbed several small parties in recent months. While the USFP's long-term goal remains the formation of a massive political pole of the left, Abdelkrim said that completely reconciling the differing opinions of all socialist leaders would be difficult. The USFP is currently not considering the small and Trotskyesque parties of the extreme left like the Democratic and Socialist L'Avant Guard Party (PADS) and the Party of Socialist Unification (PSU) for the coalition.

¶19. (SBU) Balance of Power: In addition to the publicly stated goals, during the recent meeting with Ambassador Riley, Radi also identified the "balance of power," i.e., increasing the power of the parliament and implementing effective "checks and balances" between branches of government, as a predominant party issue. Radi considered the Moroccan Government to be inevitably moving toward a constitutional monarchy, similar to those found in Europe, saying "it is just a question of time." Radi said the Parliament is currently too weak and separation of powers between the Palace and Parliament too poorly defined. He considered the United States Government to be a model worthy of emulation in correcting these defects. While the USFP openly calls for constitutional change, standing alone in the Koutla but in chorus with the opposition party PJD, Radi also related that these changes must proceed slowly and at "Morocco's pace," i.e., possibly measured in decades rather than years. Radi considered Morocco's large illiterate rural population to be largely unprepared to deliver the high quality governance needed in Morocco. Radi said that improvement in the country's weak education system needs to at least keep pace with changes in central authority to achieve the conditions necessary for a fully functioning democratic system.

USFP: Party Mechanics

¶10. (SBU) The Moroccan Constitution allows for considerable leeway for a political party to select its leadership. The USFP is made up of approximately 4,000 party members nationwide. These members selected 1,332 representatives to serve as national delegates to its Party Congress for the selection of the party's First Secretary, its Political Bureau, and approximately 300-member National Council. The National Council, considered the "parliament" of the party, is responsible for establishing the party's platform and overall political strategy. The Political Bureau, which is led by the First Secretary, is responsible for carrying out the policies and political strategies set by the National Council.

Reforms and Election Results

¶11. (SBU) For the first time in USFP history, the 8th Party Congress selected its party First Secretary, Political Bureau, and National Council members by direct secret ballot of its national delegates. From a field of 93 candidates, the national delegates selected 11 new members to its 22-member Political Bureau, abandoning a moribund system of patron lists, which many considered symptomatic of crony politics. Underscoring further the party's new embrace of

transparency, the results of the elections were posted immediately for Party Congress participants and subsequently to the media. In another reform, the party instituted a quota system for electing female party members to the Political Bureau, establishing that no less than 25 percent of the Bureau would be made up of women. As a result of the recent election, six women now serve on the Bureau, of which half were elected in the current round.

Voting Tallies for First Secretary: Radi (340); Fathallah Oualalou (315); Driss Lachgar (286); Habib El Malki (238); Nasser Heiji (15); Mohamed Lahbabi (5).

Political Bureau Members: Habib El Malki; Driss Lechgar; Al Arbi Ajoul; Abdelhadi Kheirat' Fathallah Oualalou; Mohamed Achaari; Mohamed Boubakri; Mohamed Mouhib; Amina Ouchelh; Rachida Benmassaoud; Fatima Belmouden; (Note: newly elected members follow) Touriya Majdoune; Zoubida Bouayad; Aicha Lekhmass; Ahmed Zaidi; Jamal Rhmani; Driss Abou Al Fadl; Hassan Derham; Hassan Tarek; Said Chbaatou; Abdelhamid Jmahri; Ali Bouabid.

Comment

112. (C) Despite calls from the party's "young wolves" for change, the party voted in one of its oldest and least inspiring members. Radi has served the party for more than half a century, but recent stints as head of the lower house of Parliament and as Minister of Justice lacked dynamism. Radi's age and insider credentials contradict the USFP's rhetorical calls for revitalization. Radi's insistence on staying loyal to the coalition government, while likely boosting the political tenure of Istiqlal party head and Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi, resulted in one leading journal to dub the USFP "Certified Makhzan," alluding to the party's apparent move from being perhaps the most independent party, revered for its ability to "mobilize the population," to one co-opted by the allure of greater political power, closeness to the Palace, and lucrative ministerial posts. That said, Radi's calm demeanor and reputation as a conciliator may have made him indispensable in uniting the party's contentious factions. Most important, in terms of the evolution of Moroccan democratic reform, the substantial advancement in internal democracy and transparency is a welcome improvement. Although some news article darkly characterized Ambassador Riley's recent meeting with Radi as an example of US meddling in Moroccan politics, press reaction to the meeting was generally positive. Most articles characterized the event as an example of US support for democratic principles and, in a swipe at the Moroccan political establishment, lauded the Ambassador's visit for showing more activism and interest in Moroccan politics than most Moroccan ministers. End comment.

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Riley